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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAHND/CDRJTFB SOTO CANO HO PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
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RUEAHND/CJTF-B SOTO CANO AB HO PRIORITY

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DRL FOR MMITTELHAUSER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [SCUL](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: ZELAYA ENDS TEACHERS STRIKE WITH PROMISES TO PAY
BACK-WAGES, DETAILS OF FUNDING UNCLEAR

Classified by Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

11. Summary: Honduran President "Mel" Manuel Zelaya ended the latest teacher strike over unpaid back-wages by promising to pay over 300 million Lempira (USD 15.8 million) to the teachers by year's end. Protests this year have cost over 2.5 million primary and secondary schoolchildren nearly two months of the school year. Details regarding how the government of Honduras will finance the payments to teachers or precisely which and how many teachers are owed back-wages remain unclear. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Fifty thousand teachers began a nation-wide strike on September 23, to protest wages owed to 5,000 of them by the GOH since early 2008. Those participating in the strike besides the unpaid teachers included professors from six professional colleges grouped together as the Federation of Teacher Organizations (FOHM) and thousands of teachers from outside of the capital. This latest strike lasted a total of nine days, from September 23 to October 1. Protestors blocked the bridges that surround the city center, disrupted traffic, and then surrounded the Honduran Congress building and prevented Deputies from leaving their offices, literally holding them hostage, until approximately 23:00 on September 30. (Note: President of the Congress Roberto Micheletti publicly questioned why security forces did not come to the Congress when summoned by him. Micheletti has subsequently proposed the creation of a 1,000 strong police-force dedicated solely to the protection of Congress. End note.)

13. (U) Prior to sitting down to negotiate, Zelaya met directly with a crowd of protesting teachers outside his offices. He stated that he would pay every cent owed and complimented the combative and revolutionary nature of the teacher's leadership. In a meeting with Zelaya on October 1, representatives of the teachers accepted an agreement to end the strike. The agreement provides the 5,000 teachers, un-paid since February 2008, 300 million Lempiras (USD 15.8 million) in back-wages. Payments will be made in three tranches beginning on October 10th and terminating December 120. The agreement includes salary and benefit increases, and additional positions. In addition, a percentage of the national budget will now be set aside for teachers' salaries, something already done for doctors, nurses, and public

workers.

¶4. Comment: (C) Teachers and their unions have been a thorn in the side of a number of recent administrations, regardless of party orientation. The Maduro administration (2002-2006) forced the teachers to accept structural changes that diminished their power. Since Zelaya took office, the teachers have been seeking to reverse those changes and have seen Zelaya as an ally, both because of his frequent populist rhetoric and because his mother was a teacher. Some political analysts believe that Zelaya gave the teachers what they wanted in order to form a loyal group of activists that he could call on to take the streets upon command. Concerns remain regarding the number of teachers eligible for payment, as the GOH has indicated that credible data concerning the number of teachers owed does not exist. Press sources have speculated that funding could come from Venezuelan government assistance, a short-term commercial loan or increased tax revenues.

¶5. (C) Comment continued: Teachers are widely disdained in Honduras. Many are poorly trained and some are simply appointed as a political favor. The fact that approximately 2.5 million primary and secondary students have missed over 40 days of the semester due to this strike has done nothing to improve teachers' popularity. Meanwhile, average educational attainment of Honduran adults continues to lag well behind the Latin American average at just 6.7 years, and the secondary school enrollment rate is less than half the regional average at just 41 percent, according to Ministry of Education data and World Bank World Development Indicators. End comment.
LLORENS